Those of us whose professional activity is the study of ancient philosophy typically find ourselves subject to conflicting pressures. On the one hand we inherit a predisposition (whose strength is directly proportional to the influence of analytic philosophy in our individual training) to see that activity as part of philosophy, and since philosophy itself tends to be continuously redefined by reference to the practice of influential contemporaries, we naturally wish to see, and therefore to some extent succeed in seeing, our favoured ancient writers as contributors to current debates. But when our yielding to that impulse leads to charges of ahistoricism and anachronism levelled by our more classically-minded colleagues, we respond by stressing the 'ancient' in the title 'ancient philosophy', and by emphasising the necessity of engagement with the conceptual world of ancient thought via a patient, linguistically detailed process of conceptual reconstruction. Then the dreaded appellation 'historian of ideas' rears its head, driving us once again into the arms of critical philosophy, with all its risks, and so back and forth, without any prospect of a stable resting-place. In fact the idea of such a resting-place seems to me an illusion, and the instability a sign rather of health than of morbidity. Our primary task is indeed to understand the ancients, but to understand them as philosophers, and that form of understanding requires continual reassessment of ancient writers in the light of our own understanding of what philosophy is. Not, indeed, that we are to impose that conception of philosophy on the writers whom we study; on the contrary, we must always keep before our mind discrepancies between our conception of philosophy and theirs. But those very discrepancies are intelligible to us only in the light of some supposed common conception of philosophy, such that we may legitimately contrast ancient and modern conceptions of that. The degree of historical continuity between the conceptions of that dominant in different epochs will be one of the central themes of our activity; with respect to certain topics we may be struck by the degree of continuity, in others by the lack of it, and that very assessment
may itself vary from time to time under the influence of developments in our own conception of the topic in question.

These programmatic reflections are prompted by consideration of this intriguing collection of papers, which is an expanded version of the proceedings of a conference held in 1986 at the University College of Wales, Aberystwyth, under the title 'Persons and Human Beings: Issues in Ancient and Modern Philosophy'. The published version consists of an introduction by the editor and eleven papers, grouped into two series, the first six under the heading of the status and interrelation of the concepts 'person' and 'human being', the remaining five under the title 'The Human and the Rational Mind: Models of Self-Understanding'. Each series contains discussions of both ancient and modern treatments of their respective themes, but the proportions of the two are significantly different. Of the six papers in the first series, four address directly, with a certain unity of approach, the announced theme of that section of the book. None of these papers discusses or even mentions any ancient philosopher. By contrast, in the two concluding papers in this section Troels Engberg-Pedersen and Christopher Gill deal with a different, though connected, topic, viz. the normative role ascribed to human nature by the Stoics and by Aristotle, and in the course of their discussions draw detailed comparisons between the ancients and such contemporary writers as Williams, Nagel, MacIntyre, McDowell and Wiggins. In the second half of the book the preponderance of 'ancient' and 'modern' discussions is reversed. Only one of the five papers (by George Botterill on the role of the concept of human nature in the explanation of human action) is not concerned with an aspect of ancient thought; here too the author does not mention any ancient writer. The others deal with a diversity of ancient approaches to the mind: Stephen Clark undertakes a characteristically wide-ranging exploration of the conception of the self as a divine being temporarily associated with a body, Rosemary Wright reviews the broadly physical conception of the self found in several of the Presocratics, while Christopher Rowe and Anthony Price discuss different aspects of Plato's tripartite soul, the former in the context of a critique of Martha Nussbaum's interpretation of the Phaedrus, the latter via a comparison of Plato with Freud. The two parts of the book are thus to a considerable